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Deprivation, Distance and Connectivity: The adaptation of mobile phone use to a life in Wesbank, a post-Apartheid township in South Africa

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DEPRIVATION, DISTANCE AND CONNECTIVITY:

THE ADAPTATION OF MOBILE PHONE USE TO A LIFE IN WESBANK, A POST-APARTHEID TOWNSHIP IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract

The high uptake of mobile phones in the developing world has instigated studies on the impact of the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) on poverty reduction programs and other programs that would benefit the poorest and most excluded sections of the global population. It has created new hopes as to how mobile phones would be able to close the so-called *global digital gap* that exists between the developed and the developing world and transform the fortunes of the poor. As ICTs are always embedded in social and economic realities and practices which deeply influence, define, and restrict people's mobile phone use, one should however be cautious in transporting and applying findings and studies focusing on the created opportunities of mobile phone use from one continent, country or even society to another.

This article focuses on mobile phone use of middle-aged women, living in Wesbank, a post-apartheid township in Cape Town. By highlighting the main characteristics of the community (poverty, unemployment, crime, multilingualism and migration) we discuss the influences of these characteristics of 'a life in Wesbank' on mobile phone use. Although the adoption of a mobile phone creates diverse opportunities with regards to connectivity, safety and re-imagination of the self, poverty proved to put a major constraint on the full use of the potentials.

1. INTRODUCTION

Mobile phones have become a necessity and a fixed value in the daily life of people all over the world. The still quite recent uptake of ICTs – and of mobile phones in particular – has been especially remarkable in the developing world. According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) the developing world is increasing its share of mobile subscriptions from 53% at the end of 2005 to 73% at the end of 2010 (ITU [1]). Until the arrival and uptake of mobile phones, people in the global south only had minimal access to telecommunication technologies since the uptake of landline networks has always been and is very limited due to insufficient service delivery, high installation costs and financial constraints (see also Hodge [2] and Esselaar and Stork [3]). In 2010 only 1,5 per 100 inhabitants of the African continent had a fixed landline connection, compared to 40,3 per

100 inhabitants in Europe (ITU [4]). Thanks to the marketing of very basic but cheap mobile phones, the introduction of prepay non-subscription plans (instead of contract or post-paid services) (Minges [5]) and the *caller party pays*-system, nowadays even the people at the bottom of the income pyramid have a mobile phone. For the first time they can take part in the telecommunication society, which, according to Castells, Fernandez-Ardevol and Linchuan Qiu and Sey [6] signals an important landmark for the ways that people communicate.

Mobile phone penetration in South Africa is the highest in Africa standing at well over 100 mobile cellular prescriptions per 100 inhabitants, according to the latest regional statistics of the International Communication Union [4]. The uptake of mobile phones in South Africa is much higher than the average uptake in the developing world, which is estimated to be 70,1% [4]. The high penetration rate of mobile phones has been confirmed during fieldwork in Wesbank, a post-Apartheid township in the suburbs of Cape Town, South Africa. Here, 83% of the people questioned were in possession of a mobile phone, only a small 3,4% of the questioned never possessed a mobile phone before. None of the interviewees had a landline (anymore) at the moment of the fieldwork survey.

A lot of research has been done already on the social and cultural impact of mobile phones on daily life in developing countries, on how mobile phones can be applied for developmental purposes (Forestier, Grace and Kenny [7] for example) how it can foster economic growth and the well-being of the poor (Klonner and Nolen [8] and Waverman, Meschi and Fuss [9] for example) and how mobile phones can be appropriated to close the so-called 'digital gap'[1] that exists between the developed and the developing world (Wade [10] for example) (for an overview of the literature on mobile phone use in the developing world, see Donner [11]).

Instead of looking at the impact of mobile phones on social, cultural and economic aspects of daily life in developing countries, this article will approach the research from the other way around and look at how daily life in an impoverished area like Wesbank affects the appropriation of the mobile phone and how and in which ways mobile phone use is adapted to living a life in this community. The way in which the phone has been integrated into society cannot be separated from the specific culture, economy and history of a society (Nkwi [12]). Mobile phone use is embedded in existing social and economic practices and realities, so by enumerating the main characteristics of 'a life in Wesbank' this article will discuss the main consequences of these characteristics on the use of mobile phones in this particular area.

First we situate the context of the field by giving a brief description of the history of the community Wesbank and its localisation, followed by our research method and a description of the data and their origins. Finally, we enumerate the main characteristics of Wesbank and discuss the consequences of these realities on the use and appropriation of the mobile phone. We conclude by saying that the adoption of mobile phones does create new possibilities and opportunities, but that poverty and economic realities are a major constraint on the full use of the potential.

[1] The term 'digital gap' refers to the disparities or the worldwide gap in Internet use and access between the developed and the developing world.

1.1. THE FIELD[2]

Wesbank is situated on the Cape Flats, the so-called 'dumping grounds of apartheid', 27 kilometres out of the centre of Cape Town and surrounded by many other apartheid townships such as Khayelitsha, Nyanga, Crossroads and Delft. It is by all standards a very peripheral community (Blommaert, Muyllaert, Huysmans and Dyers [13]), secluded and excluded and bordered by a highway, two very busy municipal roads and a wetland nature reserve and located 12 kilometres away from the closest job opportunities. Although officially recognized and named as 'Wesbank', the name of the community is nowhere to be found, neither in local roadmaps, the Internet (Google Maps for example) nor on traffic signs.

Figure 1: Wesbank seen from the pedestrian bridge

(Source: own picture 2005)

Wesbank was built in 1999 as part of the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP), a South African socio-economic policy framework which the first democratic government in South Africa designed and implemented after the abolishment of apartheid in 1994, to tackle the economic, spatial and racial legacy of the apartheid era and to improve government services and basic living conditions for the poor.[3] The housing project that was part of the RDP aimed to provide one million subsidized houses before the year 2000 as a response to an ever-growing crisis in housing due to internal migrations from rural areas and 'homelands' into the cities after the end of apartheid. The building of the Wesbank community was the first post-apartheid housing project in the area of Cape Town that was not segregated along racial lines but was intended to give home to deprived people, irrespective of colour and descent. This first so-called 'rainbow community' had to give home to 25 000 residents in 5149 full subsidized houses, reallocating people who had never owned a house before or who had been living in informal settlements for most of their lives (see figure 1). The actual number of residents in Wesbank is estimated to be much higher, as extended families live together on one plot, and people have been building shacks in the backyards of the houses. Due to the socio-economic instead of racial criteria in the selection

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[2] Most of the data for this chapter is extracted from Velghe Fie and Hannelore Depypere [14]. Research for this Master thesis was done in the context of the VLIR-IUC Programme 'Dynamics of Building a Better Society' at the University of the Western Cape, South Africa. Fieldwork in the community of Wesbank was done in July-September 2005 by aforementioned authors.

[3] The Reconstruction and Development Programme, A Policy Framework. http://www.polity.org.za/polity/govdocs/rdp/rdp.html

of the inhabitants, the population in Wesbank is very diverse [13]. Black, coloured, (some) white people and a growing number of African immigrants are living in the same community, although the majority of the population is coloured and Afrikaans speaking. The houses have an average size of 25 square meters, are built with brick walls and corrugated iron roofs and are not isolated. Every house has a living room, a very small bathroom with a toilet and a washing table and one bedroom.

Basic service delivery is minimal. Although two were planned, there is only one high school in Wesbank - which is insufficient for the amount of teenagers in the area. There are three primary schools, although according to the official South African norm there should be five. Since 3 years, Wesbank has its own day clinic, but the clinic is only open for babies, children and TB and HIV/AIDS patients. The nearest hospital is in Delft, a neighbouring community. To access this community, Wesbank's residents have to cross the R300 highway by a pedestrian bridge. Crossing the bridge is regarded to be very unsafe due to the presence of gangs and thieves. Since two years now, Wesbank has its own taxi rank and a multi-purpose centre. Apart from 'shebeens'[4] and informal, small-scale shops often installed in the residential premises, there is only one – relatively expensive - supermarket in the community. Gangsterism and crime rates are - although decreasing the last couple of years - very high but there is no police station in the area. The police station responsible for the area is the Mfuleni Police Station, which is almost 8 km away.

1.2. METHODS AND DATA

The data for this paper has been collected during four months of ethnographic fieldwork in Wesbank, with a special focus on cell phone use amongst middle aged women.[5] The study - conducted from January until April 2011 - included 11 face-to-face interviews with 11 women and one group interview with women attending the crafts club of the Wesbank Senior Citizen's Organisation at the Multi-Purpose Centre in Wesbank. During two of the individual interviews the daughters of interviewees were also present and participated in the interview. The face-to-face interviews were held in the residential houses of the women and lasted all for about one hour. The women were never interviewed during the first acquaintance, but after a couple of informal meetings. Nine of the women were Afrikaans-speaking. One lady was isiXhosa and another was raised in an English speaking coloured family. Most of the interviews were done in English, or in a mix between English and Afrikaans. Two interviewees answered the whole interview in Afrikaans, although most of the questions were asked in English. Potential interviewees were selected and introduced by two well-known community workers. They were always present during the first encounter with the future interviewee.

Other data was collected by handing out questionnaires in the High School in Wesbank and in one of the three primary schools.[6] The questionnaires were handed out in my and the principal's presence. The questionnaires in the High School consisted of two parts. The first

4 A shebeen is an illegal pub, and often regarded as a meeting space for township inhabitants.
5 The term 'middle aged' in Wesbank is difficult to define or outline, as a lot of 40 year old women have grandchildren already and are already retired due to chronic unemployment. Most of the women questioned were between the age of 24 and 60 years old, with an average age of 47,8.
6 Wesbank High is the only secondary school in the area and was opened in 2003. The Hoofweg Primary School is one of the three primary schools in the area.

part had to be filled in by the learners during my presence in the classroom; the second part had to be taken home and filled in by the mothers or grandmothers of the learners. The learners were all between 14 and 19 years old, the (grand)mothers between 24 and 70, with and average age of 47,8 years. The questionnaire handed out in the primary school only had to be filled in by the (grand)mothers. In total, eighty filled-in questionnaires returned, which was almost fifty percent of the distributed amount.

Daily observations and informal conversations were written down in a fieldwork diary and as much time as possible was spent in the community. One of the interviewees filled in a mobile phone diary, in which she wrote down all the text messages and phone calls she made and received during a couple of weeks.

2. ADAPTATION OF MOBILE PHONE USE TO A LIFE IN WESBANK

2.1. IMPOVERISHMENT AND FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS

The lives of most of the residents of Wesbank are characterised by impoverishment, financial constraints and high unemployment. As Wesbank was intended to relocate 'maximum subsidy' (i.e. minimum income) families (Achmat and Losch [15]), poverty has been characterising the eligible population from the first days of Wesbank's existence.

Due to the secluded localisation of Wesbank, one has to start one's own business or leave the community to find a formal job. With the closest job opportunities more than 12 kilometres away from the community, commuting out of Wesbank on a daily basis involves considerable travel expenses. Recent unemployment rates for the area are not at one's disposal. The latest report available dates from 2001 and mentions 60% of unemployment among the economically active population in the area. This figure even increases in negative terms when considering women (70,4%) and black people (76%) (Nina and Lomofsky [16]). According to Penderis 'the deprivation of Wesbank can be attributed to low wages, low qualifications, an unskilled or semiskilled workforce, rising unemployment, part time seasonal work or insecure informal sector employment, lack of job opportunities in the wider region, long home to work journeys and the financial inability of residents to seek for employment.' (Sharon Penderis, personal communication 2005). Nowadays, one estimates that the rates are even higher, although more and more people found their way to informal sector employment and social security systems such as child support, disability support, support for the elder, etc. According to Newton, 77% of those living on the site have to survive on a monthly income of R400 (€39)[7] or less [17].

This general impoverishment however seems not to be an obstacle for having a mobile phone. As mentioned before, 83% of the people interviewed or questioned had a phone at the moment of the fieldwork period. Only 3,4% never possessed a phone before. The remaining 13,6% had a cell phone before, but it got lost, stolen or broken. Mobile phone companies adapted their product offer to the (South) African market, the result being that basic mobile phones of a minimal price of €10 are easy to find. 69,7% of the people interviewed bought their cell phone themselves. 21,3% got it from a family member and 9%

[7] Exchange rate of September 2011.

got the phone at their current job. Asked for the negative consequences of having a cell phone, only 10% mention the extra financial burden a cell phone creates. The high uptake of mobile phones has been confirmed in a couple of interviews, in which people stress the fact that it's very exceptional to find someone without a cell phone, as phones are so cheap nowadays.

> X: … but today even the poorest of the poor they have a phone because they are so cheap
>
> F: So you also really have the feeling that almost all the people have a phone nowadays?
>
> X: Nowadays yes almost *everybody have a phone / almost everybody /we do get sometimes a person who doesn't have a phone on *occasion there is someone is asking me to use a phone you see to use your phone for emergencies or so / things like that.[8]

Impoverishment and financial constraints do, however, clearly influence the use and the appropriation of the cell phone. Let us now look at five main influences of the economic reality in Wesbank on cell phone use.

2.1.1. SHARING OF THE PHONE: DEVICE SCARCITY VERSUS FINANCIAL SCARCITY

Impoverishment first of all influences the way in which inhabitants of Wesbank share their mobile phones. As most of the people have a phone, people do not share the phones out of device scarcity - a phenomenon discussed in a lot of research on mobile phone use in developing countries, whether the sharing occurs in the form of mobile phone shops or as shared informal or household use (see for example de Souza e Silva, Sutko, Salis and de Souza e Silva [18], Steenson and Donner [19], Skuse and Cousins [20] and Reck and Wood [21]). According to Samuel, Shah and Hadingham [22] in a lot of African countries a mobile phone is more a household asset than a personal or individual.

Cases of shared use in Wesbank because of device scarcity are very rare, with some exceptions of - especially older - people who don't have a handset of their own. People do share their phones however because they don't always have money to buy airtime, which instigates sharing out of financial instead of device scarcity. The following interview extract is just one of the examples.

> F: ja or maybe they can also even when they have a phone when there is an emergency and they don't have air time

[8] All interview extracts are transcriptions from interviews taken during the fieldwork period between January and April 2011. In all the following extracts F is the interviewer and X, O, A, E, K, T, S are interviewees. A / indicates the breathing pauses and * indicates the emphasis on certain words. Due to privacy issues, no real names are used in this article.

X: Yeah / then they come to you

F: It happens?

X: It happens yes

O: It happens a *lot

My mobile phone became a shared phone on many occasions, as I most of the time had airtime on my phone. During the search for a missed child, my mobile phone became the shared phone of the search patrol, as my phone was initially used to inform the police about the alarming disappearance. Throughout the rest of the day, I received calls from the police and other patrol members, as it was my number that got dispersed due to the initial phone calls made with my phone. Asked to a mother if she was sharing her phone with someone else, she answered 'when there is airtime on it's not mine'. In different interviews mothers also mentioned that their phones become a shared phone from the moment the children come home from school. Not because the children don't have cell phones – very often they have[9] – but because of the fact that they don't have any airtime. For only a very small amount of airtime youngsters can go on MXIT, a very popular instant messaging programme in South Africa, for the whole evening.[10]

2.1.2. 'PLEASE CALL ME'

Another very remarkable way of using the mobile phone within the daily reality of financial constraints is the high use of free 'Please call me' messages. A 'Callback' or 'Please call me' is a free service offered by the mobile phone carrier that allows sending a SMS text message to any other telephone number, with a request to call back. Those free messages - often a daily limited amount of them[11] – read 'Please call me' and feature the cell phone number of the person requesting the call-back. Nowadays, one can add a very short personal message to these 'Please call me's' and personalise the telephone number by one's own name or recognizable nickname. 11% of the people questioned mentioned the sending of those free messages as one of the three things they do the most on their cell phone. In the following example, an extract from an interview with a 60-year-old woman, the sending of a 'Please call me' is besides calling the only thing she really needed and wanted to learn doing.

F: Is there still something you want to learn on your phone?

K: No man ok I'm not worried about that as long as I can call and just as long as I can send a Please call me that's enough for me I don't worry further on with the phone.

---

[9] 72% of the youngsters between the age of 14 and 19 years old had a mobile phones

10 To chat on MXIT for a whole evening, it suffices to have some cents of airtime left. Chatting on MXIT is significantly cheaper than SMS messaging, respectively 0,01 or 0,02 ZAR and O,80 ZAR.

[11] The three main mobile phone carriers offer different amounts of free 'Please call me' messages a day. Vodacom offers 10 of them, MTN 2 and Cell C 5.

The use of a ‘Please call me’ message is comparable to the practice of ‘beeping’, ‘flashing’ or ‘missed calling’, a practice already discussed in several studies on mobile phone use in the developing world (Ureta [23], Donner [24], Sey [25], and Slater and Kwami [25]). Users call an intended addressee and hang up before this person can answer the phone. Due to pre-paid cards and the ‘caller party pays’ system, this ‘beeping’ is without charge. The call log and the address book make it possible for the receiver to know who ‘beeped’ him or her and to call back or to decode the prearranged message, such as “I’m done, come and pick me up” (Donner [11]). Donner sees the practice of leaving those intentional missed-calls as an example of “how the process of appropriation by users in the developing world leads to the creation of “new” mobile use” [11] and as “an example of an ongoing interaction between social practices and technological factors” [24] in which users modify technology for their own purposes according to their own social and economic conditions, often in a desire to lower telecommunication expenses. This is what Zainudeen, Samarajiva and Abeysuriya [27] call “telecom use on a shoestring”.

South African mobile phone providers initiated the ‘Please call me’ messages as a way to curb the burden the missed calls were laying on the network traffic. Their strategy seems to have worked: in none of the interviews or questionnaires the practice of ‘beeping’ or ‘flashing’ was mentioned, unlike the use of the free ‘Please call me’ messages.

In common with a ‘beep fatigue’ and annoyance of unnecessary or excessive beeping (Donner [24]) the high use of ‘Please call me’ messages was also creating irritation among a lot of residents of Wesbank, especially when some unwritten but apparently normative ‘please call me rules’ were not respected. The irritations and complaints run parallel to the ‘rules of beeping’ enumerated by Donner [24], such as ‘the richer guy pays’ rule, the fact that one can only send a ‘Please call me’ for urgent or important reasons and when one really does not have any (airtime) money left. If one wants to ask for a favour or if one wants to make a good impression, it is not very advisable to use a ‘Please call me’. Moreover, it annoys the receiver if one sends too much ‘Please call me’s’, especially when not alternated with real calling by the one sending the call-back requests all the time. This is mentioned in the following interview extract.

> F: What are the main things you use your phone for?
>
> A: It’s only the messages and the pictures and then phone and income phoning and then Please call me most of the time I send Please call me’s but the people don’t respond mos on please call me’s you know.
>
> F: Yeah because they don’t have money as well
>
> A: Yes but most of the time I do it if I don’t have money but if I have money I *call that person you know if people send me *twice Please call me’s I *don’t respond on them because *I know/ for the first time I phone the next time they will do it again you see on one day so when I was finish talking with them a few minutes later they call Please call me weer (*again*) yes and that’s why I don’t respond.

2.1.3. TOPPING-UP

Only one out of ten interviewees was using a post-paid or contract system of an amount of R100 (€10) airtime per month. Having a well running taxi business together with her husband, this interviewee was financially better off than most of the other residents in Wesbank. She was mostly using her phone for business purposes and her monthly telephone bills were covered by profits of the family business.

All the other interviewees charged their phone with the pre-paid card system, in order to avoid the risk of not being able to pay the monthly bills. Very remarkable were the small amounts of airtime money that was purchased. Pre-paid top-up cards of R5 or R10 (respectively €0,5 and €1) were most commonly used and most of the time only lasted for one or two short phone calls, as one can see in the following extract.

> E: Mm mostly this time of the month when there is no money but otherwise say maybe 5 rand
>
> F: Yeah and how long do you do with that 5 rand?
>
> E: Not long because of my sister is in the *Northern Cape and usually then the 5 rand is not enough you still speaking and the 5 rand is gone

Most of the interviewees only charged airtime on their phone when a phone call needed to be made and when there was money available to do so, followed by some days or weeks without airtime in which the free 'Please call me's' or free calling minutes to telephone numbers of the same provider were used.[12] In this way, the mobile phone is used almost like a telephone in a phone booth, as people only use the money they can afford to spend and phone calls finish abruptly when the credit is finished or when there are no more coins to spend. Amongst youngsters the pre-paid vouchers of R5 were the most popular ones, as airtime was almost exclusively purchased to go on MXIT. With R5 of airtime, one can chat every evening during the span of one week.

2.1.4. APPROPRIATION OF THE PHONE

Due to the financial constraints and the impoverishment in the area, the exploration and use of features of the mobile phone that are not free of charge are limited. Almost no one in Wesbank installed or used the voice mail service, as no one wanted to run the risk of calling someone in vain and having to pay for it[13].

Internet was by 67,7% of the questioned 'never' or 'very seldom' used on their mobile phones although 38% mentioned using Internet (email, Facebook, Internet banking, Twitter,

[12] MTN for example, one of the most popular providers among the residents of Wesbank, offers free calling minutes to other MTN members during the weekend and during off-peak hours.

13 Listening to a voice mail message is free of charge. Leaving a voice mail message however is not free and charged at the rates of a normal telephone call.

etc.) as one of the things they still would like to learn on their phone. However, the use of mobile Internet was by many people regarded to be too expensive.

Free mobile phone applications however are used to the fullest. As most of the people in Wesbank do not possess many technological devices, the mobile phone is used for a broad range of reasons and goals. During the interviews and in the questionnaires, people mentioned to use their mobile phone as a lamp, a radio, a calculator, a photo camera, a laptop, a watch, an alarm, a video camera, and a game computer. Asked whether the questioned already used their cell phone the day of the interview the following things were answered:

- My phone have [*sic*] light so if ESKOM[14] switch [*sic*] our lights off I can look for the candle with my lamp.
- I look at the time.
- I was listening to music because I was doing nothing.
- I already used the calculator today.

As mentioned above, learning how to use Internet was high on the agenda of most of the people questioned. However, the extra costs that this would bring along was next to device and Internet illiteracy the main reason why most of the questioned never had used the Internet before. As only 8% of the people questioned possessed a personal computer at home - none of them with Internet connection - there was a great desire amongst the other interviewees to use the phone as a computer, although 50% of them never used a computer before in their lives. The use of Facebook, Google, Internet banking, Windows and email on the mobile phone were the things that were desired the most. One woman answered the question “What would you still like to learn on your mobile phone?” as follows: ‘Facebook and Twitter, because everybody is having it and Tweet. Imagine I could do THAT’. The ‘THAT’ was written in bold capitals, showing her enthusiasm on the topic as well as the disbelief she would ever be able to form part of the Facebook and Twitter communities.

2.1.5. EMERGENCY SERVICES

In South Africa calling the police and the emergency services from a mobile phone is not free of charge. One can only call to the Capetonian toll-free 107 emergency number – to be transferred to the relevant emergency services such as an ambulance, the police, fire or traffic services – using a Telkom phone or a payphone.[15] Calling from a cellular phone to the 107 number is impossible, so one has to call to the 107 centre on 021 480 770, which is charged at national rates.[16] To call straight to the Mfuleni Police Station, the station responsible for the area, one has to call to a landline number at national rates as well.

Although Telkom payphones or phone booths are scattered all over the Main Road in Wesbank - a lot of them are almost permanently out of order however - residents prefer to call to the emergency services or the police from inside their homes by using their mobile

[14] Eskom is the national electricity supplier.
[15] Telkom is South African’s largest communications company.
[16] Website of City of Cape Town, see http://www.capetown.gov.za/en/emergencyservices/Pages/Home.aspx

phone, out of safety and efficiency reasons. Residents did find a way to circumvent the telephone charges by calling to the call centre of their cell phone carrier. The call centre then redirects the call toll-free to the emergency services. Such redirection can sometimes take (too) long, as mentioned in the following interview extract. Most people however felt like they didn't have any choice as to do it this way, as calling at national rates is very expensive and sometimes, in cases of financial problems, simply impossible.

> F: Ja because you have to have money on your phone to be able to call / but then other people explained me you can call for free to a call centre and then they connect you with the police.
>
> K: But it takes a long time
>
> F: It takes 10 minutes or something they told me
>
> K: Ja the time they come that one is dead already and the killers did run away.

To call to the Mfuleni Police Station, the station responsible for the area, one has to call to a landline number at national rates as well. Each police van patrolling in Wesbank has a different cell phone number. The number is displayed on the van, but none of the residents I talked too were aware of these patrol emergency numbers. As different vans circulate in the area, and as every van has a different cell phone number, it is almost impossible to contact the right patrol at the right time. The South African Police Service (SAPS) with its local police stations is not reachable or contactable by SMS or text messages. The SAPS make use of one-way text messages to inform citizens who opened a case about the case number and the progress of the investigation. The text messages one receives, however, states very clearly "NOT" to respond on the received SMS (see figure 2).

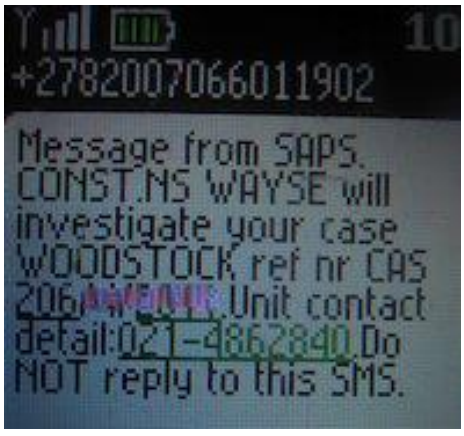

Figure 2: "Do NOT reply to this SMS". SAPS text message with case number.

(Source: own picture 2011)

2.2. CRIMINALITY AND SAFETY

Wesbank is quite an unsafe area. Crime rates are very high, although it is very difficult to obtain recent crime statistics of the area. The latest statistics from the Kuilsriver Police[17] to one's disposal date from July 2004 and mention 18 (residential) burglary, 11 common and 4 violent robberies, 5 rapes and 1 attempted and 1 effective murder cases for that specific month (Depypere and Velghe [14]). High unemployment rates, the constant inflow of new residents and, consequently, the high population density, the large number of illegal shebeens, easy access to alcohol, drugs and firearms, the absence of a police station in the community and the flourishing, deeply rooted presence of two big, well organized and many small conflicting criminal gangs are regarded to be the main reasons for the high crime rates in the community.

2.2.1. EMERGENCY SERVICES

As a consequence of this unsafety, 26% of the people questioned got themselves a cell phone for safety reasons and for cases of emergencies. All the 11 people personally interviewed could give at least one incident for which they had used their mobile phone to call to the police or another emergency service. Only 1 third of the residents who filled in the questionnaire had never used their mobile phone to call the emergency services. The following extract is only one of the many examples.

F: Ja does it happen a like for emergency cases / does it happen a lot

E: Mm yes specially weekends

F: And then it's for when you see things in the street or something or when

E: Euhm / like one day she (*her daughter)* was sitting next door and / some people were partying here and they came here like an army looking for her and they wanted to hit her / fight with her / so I call the police and they threw my window in here / and some weeks ago again / another mad / also came to throw some bricks and things so I call the police and they came and pick him up

F: And they come fast when you call them

E: Yeah

F: And do you call direct to the police because I / talked to a lot of people who say they call to the call centre

E: The call centre yes

F: Ja / so you do it *that way you call for free to the call centre and you never call directly to the police to their direct number

[17] At the moment of the fieldwork survey conducted by Depypere Hannelore and the author in 2005 the Kuilsriver Police was still responsible for the area of Wesbank. Nowadays, the Mfuleni Police is responsible for the area.

E: Sometimes yes if I got air time / enough air time then I call

Especially the elder women feel safer with an own handset. If something happens with themselves or in the neighbourhood, they can now just call to the emergency services from inside their homes. The woman in the following extract is 64 years old. She never had a landline connection before and as she lives quite far from the Main Road in Wesbank, where most of the phone booths are installed, it is only since she has a cell phone of her own that she can call for help when needed.

K: I feel more safe because I can if something happen and I *see it's *wrong then I can call the police to help /you see for I can see something wrong here and I will look and I can call the police then they can come and help the people
F: So you used it already to call the police
K: Yes I did a lot of times
F: Just because you see things in the street and
K: Yes
F: And do you call straight to the police because most of the people I talked they called to the call centre because that's for free and then they connect you with the police
K: I call straight to the police
F: Ah so you pay for the call
K: Ja
F: Ah ok so you always make sure as well that you have money on your phone
K: Euh on the moment I haven't got / but if I see something wrong before / I borrow the money from my neighbour / and she gave me 10 rand a I buy the air time and I didn't tell her what I want to do

The feeling of (personal) safety and the fact that one is always only one phone call away from emergency services such as the ambulance or the police recurs in many mobile phone studies all over the world. Many studies show that the concern for safety is the primary motive for women to acquire a mobile phone, and also an important one for men (Katz and Aakhus [28]). It is not at all surprising that, in an unsafe area like Wesbank the mobile phone creates a sense of safety and connectedness that, due to the low landline connections nowadays and in the past, is new to many residents.

2.2.2. CHILDREN AND CELL-PHONES

More than 72% of the youngsters who answered the questionnaires that have been handed out in one high school and one primary school in Wesbank had a mobile phone of their own. Those youngsters were all between 14 and 19 years old. Only one third of the youngsters did buy the phone by themselves, the rest got the handset from family members, in most cases from their parents. Asked to the parents, more than half of the them answer 'safety' as the

main reason why they decided to give their child(ren) a phone of their own, as stated by the mother in the following extract who gave her daughter a mobile phone when she reached the age of 13.

> X: And the reason why I got it for her (*her daughter*) is because you know for safety purposes it is because children you know I needed it for when I need to go somewhere also they have a phone to stay in contact with me I'm on the road I'm very paranoid so I phone them like every *ten minutes to see if everything is ok … so I'm very paranoid and I always call them yeah just to know are you ok is everything ok.

Some studies in the developing world have been focusing on the difference between mobile phones as a complement or as a substitute for landline connection (Garbacz and Thompson [29] and Hodge [2] for example). In the interview extract above, it is clear that the mobile phone is not a complement but a substitute for a fixed telephone line, as the interviewee decided to buy her daughter a cell phone so she can reach the children at home when she is not there. In line with those other studies in the developing world, most people in Wesbank use their mobile phone as a substitute instead of as a complement for landline telephone connection. Most of the residents of Wesbank who did have a landline connection before, cancelled the connection once or before they were in the possession of a private handset, to avoid financial problems due to unaffordable monthly telephone bills.

Especially due to negative press coverage over the years and due to circulating city legends and real stories, MXIT has a bad connotation in many people's minds. Media, government, education institutions and parents stigmatizing MXIT connect the instant messaging programme that is so popular amongst youngsters with potential addiction, cyber harassment, immorality, abuse, adultery, and exuberant sexual behaviour and regard it as a free-zone for unsafe behaviour, rudeness and pornography (see also Chigona and Chigona [30] and Chigona, Chigona, Ngqokelela and Mpofu [31]). This negative attitude towards MXIT is mentioned during the following interview, with a 24-year-old man who had participated for some minutes in the interview I was having with his mother. He shared his negative feelings about MXIT with many other people in Wesbank I spoke to.

> R: Uhuh I don't believe in MXIT / you hear funny stories about MXIT like in this year one child from Vrededal was chatting with a man in Bellville and she said she was 19 but she was 16 and when she come here she slept with the man and the man go out and then another man / the neighbour came / there is a girl from Cape Town who MXIT with a guy in Pretoria she is now in Pretoria her family doesn't know where she is so MXIT is not right /(*silence)* I don't do MXIT I want to get me another phone so I can have Facebook / they say Facebook is better.

The mother of the young man cited in the extract above was working as a psychological police counsellor in cases of child and partner abuse. She claimed to have been counselling many children, women and men involved in cases of abuse and adultery as a consequence of MXIT chatting.

However, in contrast to Chigona et al [30] and Chigona et al [31] not all the parents interviewed or questioned have been exclusively negative about MXIT. Several parents also mentioned some positive aspects of MXIT, applauding the fact that it is thanks to MXIT that their children spend more time inside the safe environment of the house, instead of hanging out in the streets. From inside their houses, under the watchful eye of the parents, children are now able to chat with their friends and to keep in touch with their social networks in and outside the community. In other words, MXIT is taking away the spatial - but safe - boundaries of the home. Most of the parents, however, were very aware of the dangerous aspects of MXIT, such as the chat rooms where one can chat with strangers, and made sure the MXIT behaviour of their children got curtailed and controlled when necessary, by checking the contacts in their contact list, by informing their children about the dangers (see also [31]) and by regularly reading the MXIT conversations of their children.

The youngsters themselves reported the abovementioned positive consequences of MXIT as well. "*I spend more time inside the house", "I stopped walking around"* and "*It changed my life completely because now I can stay out of the danger outside the house"* are some of the answers when asked for the changes a mobile phone have brought in their lives. This positive attitude towards MXIT was also mentioned my Donner and Gitau [32] in which they quote a boy living in a rather unsafe low-income neighbourhood close to Wesbank. He is cited as followed: "*It is a good thing they made, … there is so much insecurity ... so I meet my friends either here* [the mall in century city] *or on MXIT … it is nice, because I do not have to worry about security and stuff like that if I am talking to them on my phone".*

2.2.3. THEFT AND ROBBERIES

According to de Souza e Silva *et all* [18] in their study on mobile phone appropriation in the *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil 'it is easy to get a phone; it is easy to lose a phone', as phone theft was very common in the area. In Wesbank, thefts and robberies – often quite violent - of mobile phones also have become a new lucrative crime among the active criminal gangs in the community. One third of the persons questioned who didn't have a mobile phone at the moment of the survey lost their previous handset through theft. One of the interviewees did not want to have a phone because she did not want to run the risk of being violently robbed, as stated in this following extract. Her friend X participating in the interview did have a mobile phone and practically took the phone with her everywhere she went, but she did confirm the danger this created.

> F: What is the biggest reason for you to not want one
>
> O: The stealing of the people / taking phones off and making / maybe just hurting you robbing you and hurting you

X: They don't only rob you they *stab you for your own phone

O: For your phone yes

X: Actually you're putting your life in danger

F: Does it happen a lot here in Wesbank

X: A lot / a lot

F: But you take your phone everywhere you go even when you have to walk up and down the Main Road

X: I take my phone *everywhere

As mentioned in the extract above, the risk that one runs of being robbed does not restrain people from taking their cell phone whenever they leave the house. Having a mobile phone and being reachable and being able to reach someone any time any place seemed to be more important than the danger the carrying of a mobile phone created. Clear unwritten do's and don'ts on where and when to use and show your phone do however exist and do influence the use of the phone in the community. Switching off the sounds of your phone in public places is one such rule. This to prevent potential thieves from knowing you have your phone on you, in case someone would call or send a text message while you are in a public place. When I wanted to make a phone call in front of the supermarket in Wesbank, situated on one of the most busy and lively crossroads in Wesbank opposite the taxi rank, my companion made me subtly but concisely clear that this really was not the appropriate place to do so and compelled me to wait with my phone call until we were in a place that was more closed or less busy. Calling or texting while walking on the street is hardly done. Most South African women I met and especially the women living in the poorer areas confronted with high crime rates carry their handset between their bosom and their bra, as pockets and handbags are too obvious hiding places for potential thieves.

2.3. NO-ONE IS FROM WESBANK

As Wesbank only exists since 1999, almost no one who is actually living in the community is originally from the area, except for some residents who were informally living on the territory before it officially got designated to become a RDP-reallocation housing project. This informal settlement was known as Camelot. The Camelot settlers also qualified for the maximum subsidy, so most of the original dwellers are received in the community.

However, 58% of the actual residents of Wesbank are originally from somewhere else in the Western Cape and other – formal or informal – communities in and around Cape Town. 21% is originally from the Eastern Cape and 8% was born in the Northern Cape. The remaining 13% originate from other South African provinces (such as Gauteng, Kwazulu-Natal and Free State) or from abroad (especially Zimbabwe, Somalia and Congo) (Depypere and Velghe [14]). As the youngsters who filled in the questionnaires were all between 14 and 19 years old, none of them were born in Wesbank and all immigrated at a (very) young age.

During former fieldwork in the area in 2005 (Depypere and Velghe [14]) it became very clear that a lot of Wesbank's residents were struggling with the dichotomisation between 'having a home' and 'having a house'. Due to apartheid and impoverishment, many South Africans have constantly been forced to move to places with which they had no historical or emotional bound.[18] This fluidity of places of residence and 'homes' and the forced removals to unknown environments in the passed is still influencing most resident's perception of space and place today. Statements as "I am glad I have a house" followed by "but I really don't like Wesbank" are very common [14]. For many residents, Wesbank is a *place* of great value, in the sense that their *houses* are located there, but their *homes* can be located at the other side of the country. Many residents perceive Wesbank as "just another place to stay"; regardless of the fact they see it as an endpoint of their migration or as a temporally stop before the next 'move'. Although most of Wesbank's residents have now been living in the community for 10 years or more and community feeling is growing, many people still not perceive their *house* as their real *home*.

Thanks to the mobile phone, it is now possible to reach *home* from inside their *house*. One third of the interviewees bought themselves a cell phone with the main reason to be able to contact other family members. 82% of the questioned mention 'family' as the main group in their mobile phone network, followed by 14% who mention 'friends'. The importance of calling or texting family and friends on a regular base was mentioned in a lot of interviews. The following interview extract is just one example.

> F: And is your family do they live here around or do they live further away?
>
> K: Some is in Paarl, some in Worcester some is in and some is in Jo'burg
>
> F: And how did you before you had your phone / how did you do it to hear your family?
>
> K: Euhm / *then I go to a public phone and phone *there but it take a lot of money you see that's why I decide to get myself a mobile phone
>
> X: We need to stay in contact / especially my family they are from Muizenberg and Grassy Park *way far from here very far from here so we need to stay in contact they need to know how the children are doing you know are they fine are they ok
>
> F: And that's most of the time by calling or by SMS
>
> X: By calling most of the time by calling / we've got a lot of *chats like I've got brothers and sisters in Mitchell's Plain / they are *spread around the country so but

[18] 39% of the people questioned had lived in three of more places before coming to Wesbank. 46,6% had lived in 2 other places before and only 14,5% had lived in one place before migrating to Wesbank (Depypere and Velghe [14])

we are originally from Lavender so most of the family is that side Muizenberg Lavender Capricorn[19]

F: Ja and do you see them a lot?

X: No we no that's the thing that's why I need my mobile phone 'cause I don't see them you see / if I can hear their voices that's fine … the phone is not taking anything away the phone is actually just bringing things it's so much better for me to actually just *hear my sister's voice or my brother's voice or my niece's voice

O: Yeah then you feel so much better

X: Then I feel so much better there is *hope on the other side you know it's like that … someone thinking about you someone calling and SMSing me they can't see my face but you know I can send pictures you know I can send pictures on my phone.

According to De Bruijn, Nyamnjoh and Brinkman [33] the mobile phone "compresses distance between people, thereby making it possible for people to cope in new ways with long periods of separation from family and friends thanks to the virtual or symbolic presence that the mobile phone provides". According to De Bruijn *et al* [33] this new connectedness "raises questions about the extension of social spaces and the de-essentialization of geographies, instigating a new politics of belonging that emphasises flexibility over and above permanence". As in the interview extract above, the mobile phone calls to the family created a sense of attachment and belonging that would not have been possible without the possession of a phone. Ureta [23] in his article on low-income families in Santiago, Chile also remarks that the management of the spatial distance with social networks has become a central issue in the management of the cell phone. In cases of low physical mobility (due to impoverishment and the often secluded localisation of low-income communities) and distanced social networks, the handset "becomes a necessity which generates a sensation of closeness-over-distance" [23]. As mentioned by the interviewee in the extract above, one feels so much better if family members or *home* are just a phone call, an SMS or a MMS picture away.

None of the youngsters interviewed were born in Wesbank, but migrated to the area together with their parents at a certain age. Most of them also had to change school once they moved to Wesbank. As the schools in Wesbank are not sufficient for the amount of learners in the area, a lot of children and youngsters attend school in other communities. To stay in touch with old and present school friends or with friends from former neighbourhoods, MXIT has become the solution to cope with this separation and, as mentioned above, a way to escape the spatial boundaries of the house and of the community. One mother stated that she decided to give her daughter her own mobile phone so she can keep in touch with her school friends during holidays and over the weekend.

[19] Lavender (Hill), Capricorn and Muizenberg are about 30 kilometers away from Wesbank. Going from Wesbank to these areas with public transport is complicated and expensive, as one has to take at least 5 different local taxis or minibuses. For a resident of Wesbank this 30 kilometers is a very big distance to bridge.

2.4. UNEMPLOYMENT

2.4.1. JOB SEEKING

As mentioned above, (chronic) unemployment rates for the community of Wesbank are very high. According to Nina and Lomofsky [16] the unemployment rate for women living in the area was estimated to be more than 70% in 2011. New communication technologies such as the mobile phone have the potential to simplify the access to the job market and the search for a job. Although it was clear that women did not use their phone to the fullest when it came to job seeking, most women were aware of the potentials a mobile phone and especially mobile Internet could create. Most of them applauded the fact that daily travels to centres of job creation are no longer necessary. Job seekers now only have to travel once to distribute their curricula vitae, on which they mention their mobile phone number, and then wait for a potential phone call at home. The fact that employers can reach them on their handsets makes it possible to save a considerable amount of travel costs to and from centres of employment, as mentioned in the following extract.

> X: To find a job being called for a job when you give in your CV and you know your number is on your CV you know and then they call you / even looking for a job when you look in the newspaper you just dial the number
>
> O: O ja you can just give your number

Although the Internet has created an alternative way to apply for jobs - looking for online job advertisements, sending curricula vitae by e-mail, social networking sites and instant messaging programmes such as MXIT who offer free advertising spaces (see figure 3), etc. – the use of the mobile Internet to find employment is still very limited among residents of socially excluded and poor communities (see also Donner, Gitau and Marsden [34] and Chigona, Beukes, Vally and Tanner [35]).

Figure 3: MXchange application on MXIT, job section

(Source: own pictures)

The interest in online job seeking however is quite high, as becomes clear in the following interview extract. The interviewee is a 23-year-old girl who participated in the interview I was having with her mom.

F: Is there still something you want to learn on your mobile phone

X: I don't know how to Internet

F: Internet and what would you use it for

X: For jobs and things like that

According to Donner et al [34] in South Africa's highly stratified economy, particularly professional and service-sector jobs in the formal economy are likely to be advertised online on one of dozens of listing services. As a consequence, many formal-sector employers in urban South Africa virtually assume potential employees have access to the Internet, by expecting job seekers to place their CV on the web for example. As most of middle aged women in Wesbank are Internet illiterate, they miss out on those most secure job opportunities.

In line with other literature (Chigona *et all* [35] and Miller [36]) there were also a lot of Wesbank's residents who firmly believed in the traditional methods of finding a job (face-to-face contact, job advertisements in print, printed and personally distributed curricula vitae, etc.). My question to two interviewees whether they ever applied for a job by simply sending a text message was ridiculed and dismissed as "unprofessional", followed by several "*no, no, no*'s" and giggling.

2.4.2. INFORMAL ECONOMY AND JOB CREATION

Due to the high unemployment rates in Wesbank and the surrounding areas and lack of access to formal sector employment, informal businesses are booming. Groceries stores, artisanal shops, fruit stands, tyre shops, electrical repair shops, hair dressers and shebeens are scattered all around Wesbank, whether in the residential premises, in containers or in self-made stalls constructed on the footpaths.

In line with many other studies in the developing world (see for example Donner [37]), interviewees confirmed that the possession of a mobile phone have helped their small businesses, organizations or other informal activities. Although mobile phone are no panacea for small entrepreneurs in Wesbank, in the sense that they are not exuberantly expanding the business and costumer networks outside the community, they do strengthen the ties with existing clients and within the community itself (see also Sey [38] for similar findings in Ghana). Clients are able to reach the business on their phones, appointments and orders can be made over the phone, networks can be broadened and a cell phone number can be displayed on business publicity and advertisements. Everywhere in Wesbank one can find publicity and advertisements of informal, private companies on which mobile phone numbers are displayed (see figure 4).

Figure 4: Advertisements for (informal) businesses with cell phone number

(Source: own pictures)

The woman who owns a taxi business together with her husband cannot imagine her life without a mobile phone anymore. She was mainly using her phone for business purposes.

> S: Sometimes is two or three times a day sometimes is *ringing the *whole day or I use it the whole day to call my husband and I must do stuff for him and I must call him … because I do the banking of the company and sometimes people are looking for my husband so I must call him and ask if he can see the people if they can come to the [taxi]rank …or when the van is *stuck we must phone each other go and look what is wrong with the van.

Two female friends who started a sewing business need their mobile phones so people can place orders or so they can inform where they can find the cheapest fabrics. Another women buys meat in big amounts to lower costs and then sells them with some profit to different clients in the community. Once she managed to buy a new amount of meat, she sends a text message to all the people who might be interested.

2.4.3. BOREDOM

Due to chronic unemployment a lot of residents of Wesbank – and especially middle-aged women – desperately try to fill their days at home and in the community. As social activities are rare (except for church meetings, bible studies, adult classes in the evening and a couple of crafts clubs organized by community members in the multi-purpose centre) and safety issues keeps people from going out a lot, many people spend their days inside their premises and on their plots. In a lot of households, the mobile phone has become a welcome leisure device. More than a third of the answers on the question “what are the three main things you use your phone for” concerned leisure applications such as ‘playing games’, ‘MXIT’ and ‘music’. When youngsters without a phone use the phone of their parents or friends it is in 69% of the cases for leisure activities (pictures, music, downloading, MXIT and games). When I told a teenage girl that in my country we don’t have such a thing as MXIT she asked me quite shocked what I was doing then all day. In the following extract, a daughter S is trying to convince her mother E to register on MXIT so she would feel less bored during daytime.

> E: But there is nothing on my phone except the games sometimes I do play games
>
> S: That’s why you must MXIT
>
> E: *(laughs)*
>
> F: You want your mommy to MXIT / why?
>
> S: Because she is most of the times boring at home doing nothing just sleeping

Another woman mentioned that when she feels bored, she sends somebody a text message or she calls someone to just have someone to talk to. As calling and sending SMS text messages is quite expensive, especially when one is unemployed, going on MXIT is a more popular leisure activity. A lot of youngsters and – more exceptional – adults chat all day out of boredom. During two of the interviews, that both lasted for more than one hour during day time, the daughters of the interviewees were chatting on MXIT the whole duration of the interview. Both daughters just graduated from High School and were unemployed.

Most people interviewed used MXIT mainly for social networking purposes. According to Chigona *et al* [31] the system ‘allows the youth to sustain and/or nurture networks of friends and associates and to increase their social connections’. ‘Captured’ within the four walls of

their houses, youngsters and adults who are on MXIT - often out of boredom - are strengthening and expanding their social networks, hoping to 'break out' of the secluded and excluded lives they are living in Wesbank. Lisa, forty-five years old, registered on MXIT in 2008 and is since then a daily MXIT chatter under the nickname 'Sexy Chick'.[20] Highly enthusiastic about the cheap costs and the new – virtual and real – encounters with men and condemned by her priest and many people in her social environment, Lisa is now living a 'secret MXIT life' inside her house, creating new identity repertoires which she feels she has to hide from people who are of the opinion that chatting and being a good Christian are not combinable.

2.5. ILLITERACY IN A MULTILINGUAL ENVIRONMENT

2.5.1. 'I DON'T READ OR WRITE, I'M ALWAYS ON MXIT'

Most of the middle-aged women interviewed and questioned did go to school during their childhood, although a lot of them never finished high school. The average age to quit school was 17 years, which is just one year before matriculation, the final year of high school. Four of the women interviewed had been following extra literacy courses at the adult evening classes, organized in the high school in Wesbank, as they had the feeling that their writing and reading skills in - especially - English were not sufficient.

Asked if they read or write in their leisure time, 66% of the women claimed to read sometimes, but more than half of those 66% only read the Bible every now and then, mostly in Afrikaans. Newspapers and magazines were not so commonly read, and 'Die Son', a sensational tabloid with a lot of pictures, was the most popular newspaper among the middle-aged women interviewed. 70% of the youngsters say they "sometimes read in their free time" but only 10% of them claimed to have read something the day before they filled in the questionnaire.

Compared to reading and writing on paper, a lot more reading and writing is done on the mobile phone, especially amongst youngsters. Although moral panics and public anxiety have been blaming texting and chatting for the corruption of standard language and the degradation in spelling of especially youth writing (see Vosloo [39]), people in the new communicative environment – developed through the growing uptake of ICT's – are reading and writing more than ever before. Text messages, instant messaging chatting, blogging, tweeting, Facebook, etc. all form platforms of literacy and literacy acquisition, although research has shown that most do not think of their electronic or digital communications as 'real' writing or reading (see Lenhart, Arafeh, Smith and Macgill [40]). The answer 'I don't read or write, I'm always on MXIT' on the question if one was reading in one's leisure time, proves this 'traditional printed and pen and paper-centred' view on literacy practices. If one is the whole day on MXIT, one is actually reading and writing the whole day through, immersing oneself in a literate environment that probably would have been much more limited without the existence of a mobile phone. According to Banda cited in Deumert and Masinyana [41] SMS writing constitutes an important form of everyday literacy in South Africa, especially in the metropolitan areas.

[20] Lisa is a fictional name

2.5.2. DEVICE ILLITERACY

Device illiteracy among the middle-aged women interviewed and questioned is quite high. Three of the ten interviewees did not know how to send a text message and one third of the youngsters questioned said that they would like to teach their parents how to send a text message. More than one third of the (grand)mothers questioned admitted that they don't write their text messages themselves, but ask help from their (grand)children. The interest in 'cell phone courses' to learn basic things like sending text messages and 'please call me's' was quite high among most of the residents I talked to.

Most of the interviewees have learned from their children how to use the basic features on their cell phones. This teaching however seems to create a lot of tension, as the teaching goes too fast according to the mothers and too slow according to the children. Some women struggle to find and try things out by themselves, as the woman in the following interview extract who had asked her son several times to explain how to take a picture and to send a text message. As the teaching went too fast and as she didn't want to ask for an explanation once more, she is now trying to discover the features and applications by herself, often without any success.

> F: You said there was something you wanted to learn, no?
>
> K: Yes, I want to learn how to send euh a letter for someone
>
> F: A message ja
>
> K: Ja and *then I would like to know how do I go in *here (pointing to the camera) to come to the euh to the camera
>
> F: Ah ok. You would like to learn how to take pictures
>
> K: I'm just using to *call someone if I need to call someone and / that's all sometimes the children they ask me to take a picture then I *try and I *try /then I tried and I look and then *all of the sudden I get it / and then I know how to take the picture /and that's all
>
> F: but then you don't find the picture back afterwards because it's somewhere there in your phone
>
> K: It=it *is somewhere here in /but I don't know where to find it again (*laughs*)

Apart from learning how to text message and how to take pictures, there were many women interested in learning how to go on the Internet and how to play games.

2.5.3. LANGUAGE REPERTOIRES

Due to its genesis of being a full-subsidy RDP-housing project aimed to shelter impoverished people coming from all different (often informal) areas in and outside Cape Town and even

the Western Cape, Wesbank is a multilingual and multi-racial community. Approximately 73% of the residents are mixed-race, mainly Afrikaans-speaking coloured people, 25% are Xhosa and a further 2% are white, Asian or foreigners from other parts of Africa (Dyers [42]). As a consequence, Afrikaans, English and isiXhosa are the three main languages spoken in the community, which is noticeable in the language choices and uses in SMS communication. According to the answers in the questionnaires, 37,8% asserts to only use Afrikaans in text messaging, 13,5% only English, and 5,4% only Xhosa. 27% of the people questioned use Afrikaans and English, 13,5% English and Xhosa and 1,3% use all three languages. People seem to make deliberate choices on which language to use, according to the addressee, the purpose or the content of the text message. "*I decide on the basis of whose home language or if it is for business", "When I send it to my family I use Xhosa and when I send a message to my boss I use English", "Depends on whom I'm writing to, on close friend I use both languages", "Depends on what I'm about to write in what context – kombuis Engels*[21]*"* are some of the answers on the question how one chooses the language used in text messages. The two last answers ('*I use both languages*' and '*kombuis Engels*') refer to the code-mixing and –switching of different languages in one and the same text message, something also extensively discussed in Deumert and Masinyana [41] when it comes to English and isiXhosa in text messages. The following text messages were written down on the questionnaires.[22]

1 - '**Sê mams moet sop maak asb**. *Reply* **om te sê wat mams sê AsB**.'

('Tell mom she has to make soup please. Reply to tell what mom said please'

2 - '*Hey wel dne on ur presentation, Im sure u wre gr8. Enjoy ur* ***dae***'

(Hey, well done on your presentation. I'm sure you were great. Enjoy your days')

3 - '*We always mis each otha – how r u – i was @tygrbrghosp 2day wit roxy –* ***leka*** *tired'*

(We always miss each other – how are you – I was at Tygerberg hospital today with Roxy – very tired')

4 - '*Hey gal wht r u upto jst thought I shud c how u r doin n I mic u a lot gudnyt sleeptyd'*

(Hey gal what are you up to? Just thought I should see how you are doing and I miss you a lot. Good night sleep tight.'

As can be seen in the underlined words in the messages above, the English produced by the 'texters' is similar to the global SMS norm or the global 'medialect', which has become an international *supervernacular*, used by many people in text and instant messaging and Internet communication all over the world. The use of abbreviations (shortenings and letter

[21] 'Kombuis Engels', also called 'Kaaps' or 'Kombuis Afrikaans', 'Cape Flats English' or 'Cape Flats Afrikaans' (depending on the matrix language) is the name given to the unique blended variety of English or Afrikaans and to a lesser degree other languages like Malay, isiXhosa, etc. spoken in the Cape Peninsula.

[22] Following transcriptions of text messages are collected through the questionnaires, in which the questioned were asked to literally write down their last sent and received text message. In the transcriptions above bold is used for Afrikaans, italics for English and 'textspeak' is underlined.

reductions such as '*dne', 'wel'* and '*mis'*), phonological approxiations (*'u'* instead of 'you' and '*r'* instead of 'are'), and the use of number homophones (*'gr8'* and *'2day'*) is not typical South African, but forms part of an internationally recognizable register of English, in which norms on how to abbreviate, shorten and merely write are increasingly stipulated and controlled.

At the same time however there is a clear localization of the messages. In line with Deumert and Masinyana [41] the text messages reflect writing conventions that have been reported internationally, but at the same time contain features that makes them distinctly South African, such as the code switching to Afrikaans (*'dae'* and *'leka'*) and the abbreviation '*mic'* for 'miss', which is according to Deumert and Masinyana [41] a local abbreviation which is not used elsewhere in the English-speaking world. Example 1 and 2 could be text messages written from anywhere in the world as they are mainly written in a global medialect of English, but the last sentence of both text messages localise them as distinctly South African, as they contain code-switching to Afrikaans by using the words 'leka' and 'dae'.

2.6. Discussion and Conclusion

As mentioned in the introduction, a lot of studies have focussed already on the developmental opportunities and social, economic and cultural impacts of the uptake and spread of mobile phones in the developing world. According to Sey [38] studies on the impact of the use of ICT's in poverty reduction programs and other programs that would benefit the poorest and most secluded and excluded sections of the population have focussed on the potentials that the spread of ICT's create, without actually discussing how these potentials can be translated into widespread reality. This is, according to Sey [38] in line with other studies that have emerged after the invention and uptake of every new ICT in the past. Print media, radio, television, video, fixed telephones, and the Internet have each on their turn created new hopes as to how they could transform the fortunes of the poor in developing countries. A vast amount of literature for example has focused on the opportunities that cheap and easily accessible mobile phones would bring to close the so-called 'global digital gap' that was created by unequal access to Internet between de developed and the developing world. Initially, however, one had hoped that the Internet would be the panacea to finally bring information to the poorer and underdeveloped parts of the world.

Although the usefulness of those studies cannot be denied, and although a lot of studies and development programs using mobile phones as a development tool have definitely proven to be effective (see for example Aker, Ksoll and Lybbert [43] for a study on the impact of mobile phones on a literacy program in Niger, Reuben [44] on the impact of mobile phones on the fishing industry and economic growth in India, and the book edited by Ekine [45] on mobile activism in Africa) it is important to keep in mind that ICT's and technological development are always embedded in social and economic realities and practices which deeply influence and define people's mobile phone use. Although mobile phones can help to (re)shape and elaborate the economic, political, cultural, linguistic and social capital of the people and of society – each with their own specific culture, economy and history - one first of all has to look at how society (re)shapes and influences (the use of) the technology. As society and technologies are dialectically related, one should be cautious in transporting and applying findings and studies from one continent, country or society to another.

For Wesbank's residents, communication, connectivity, and safety seemed to be the three main reasons to purchase a mobile phone, which runs parallel to other research in developed as well as developing countries. Family and friends were the two main groups in their mobile phone networks. Exceptionally, some interviewees used their phones for business purposes. The adoption of a mobile phone has strengthened their networks with existing clients and made communication concerning the business easier but didn't necessarily led to a considerable growth in turnovers. Mobile phones do however seem to broaden and strengthen social networks, especially with relatives and friends staying outside and sometimes far away from Wesbank. As mobile phones are in most cases no complement but a substitute for landline telephone connections, for many people in Wesbank it's the first time in their lives that family members and friends are just a phone call or a SMS away, and this from within their premises. Mobile phones also created new networks and enabled people to re-imagine themselves, often through the use of MXIT. In open chat rooms, one is able to virtually meet people from outside the community and from all over South Africa. This enables people to - at a very low cost - break out of their immediate environment without physically having to leave it.

That the adoption and use of mobile phones is however very much influenced by daily realities and constraints determining specific societies, communities and livelihoods becomes very clear when one takes a closer look at the resident's use of mobile phone. Looking at mobile phone use of middle-aged women and their children living in poverty on the outskirts of Cape Town, it became clear that the increased capabilities and the potentials that a mobile phone would be able to bring depended "on how other aspects of their livelihoods are organized" (Sey [38]). According to the same author [38] "high levels of mobile phone adoption do not guarantee development outcomes, especially if other elements in the livelihoods environment (e.g. vulnerability context, livelihood assets, transforming institutions and structures, livelihood strategies) are not appropriately aligned". In Wesbank, poverty proved to put a major constraint on the full use of the potentials of a mobile phone and severely influenced the way and the frequency in which the residents used their handsets. First of all, "anytime anywhere" communication and "perpetual contact" (Katz and Aakhus [28]) – with relatives and friends was simply not possible, due to financial or safety issues. Secondly, the extent to which mobile phones can be called in for developmental and enriching purposes (job seeking, business growth, sharing of information, the closing of the 'digital gap', etc.) was highly restricted because of the unaffordable costs that this creates. People living in poverty are forced to daily make deliberate cost-benefit analyses on every cent they spend. Spending money on communication technology only seemed to be acceptable when one could benefit from it in a short-term at the lowest costs possible, whether by feeling comforted and connected when hearing relatives or friends or by calling the emergency services in times of severe thread.

Research, studies and projects focussing on the possibilities and opportunities that mobile phones create in developing countries should keep this short-term vision determined by poverty in mind, and that, as a consequence, people's circumstances (re)shape the technology as much as technology can (re)shape society.

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